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PRESS RELEASE

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Rivers State Governor Abolishes health facility user-fees for persons living with HIV following U.S. Government advice

Port-Harcourt- July 26, 2019: Rivers State Governor, Nyesom Ezenwo Wike, announced on Wednesday, June 26, 2019, that the state has abolished health facility user-fees for persons living with HIV as advocated by the U.S. Government.

The Governor stated that Rivers State Government would take over payments in all their public health facilities. This action will increase access to anti-retroviral treatment, improving the likelihood of Rivers State will reach epidemic control of HIV.

Governor Wike also pledged to support the efforts of the United States Government, through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to alleviate the suffering of people living with HIV in Rivers State. The support would be facilitated through a close working relationship with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDC) and the Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria (IHVN), who are supporting HIV treatment services in Rivers State. Earlier, the US Government Delegation to Rivers State, led by Dr. Tedd Ellerbrock from CDC, had appealed to the Governor to address the issue of user-fees and remove all other bottlenecks that hinder easy access to anti-retroviral treatment for persons living with HIV.

Dr. Ellerbrock informed the Governor of USG's strategy to rapidly increase the number of people living with HIV who have access to life-saving treatment. To do this successfully, all barriers to access must be addressed comprehensively.

The United State Government, through PEPFAR, is implementing an ART Surge Strategy across Nigeria, with emphasis on states and geographical locations that are hardest hit with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Over the next 18 months, the ART Surge Strategy is to ensure an additional half-million people access ART and stay on treatment, thereby remaining healthy and reducing the possibility of HIV transmission.

USAID collaborates with the Nigerian Ministry of Budget and National Planning, the Nigerian Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Power, and Education, and state-level government counterparts, among others, to structure the estimated \$2.45 billion agreement, which runs through the end of 2020.

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